

Rehabilitating the Brawner Farm

Manassas National Battlefield Park

In 2007, Manassas National Battlefield Park completed a project to rehabilitate the Brawner Farm, a historic property on the Second Manassas Battlefield. Left vacant in the 1970s, the post-Civil War farmhouse suffered from advancing deterioration and required extensive repairs. With line item construction funding, the park worked with the Denver Service Center to develop a project to rehabilitate the house and improve public access to the site. As a result of the project, the exterior of the house has been restored to its early 1900s appearance, while the interior has been adapted to provide for public use for interpretation.



The post-Civil War house at Brawner Farm, prior to NPS rehabilitation. The view is from the northeast. The right portion (or north block) of the house bears signs of antebellum construction and may have been moved to this site after the Civil War. It partially overlays the archeological remains of the pre-Civil War house. The left (south block) portion of the house was added c. 1905.



The house following rehabilitation. The view is from the northeast. Note the new wood shingle roof and siding, as well as the rebuilt foundation. The platform at the east entrance conceals a vault containing the building's fire suppression equipment.

Project Background

On August 28, 1862, the tenant farm of John C. Brawner witnessed the opening engagement of the Second Battle of Manassas. As Union troops under Brig. Gen. Rufus King marched eastward past the farm, Confederate forces under Maj. Gen. T. J. "Stonewall" Jackson fired upon the Union column and set in motion the events that would trigger the three-day Second Manassas battle. Park planning at Manassas over the last 25 years has focused on enhancing visitor understanding of Second Manassas in part by highlighting the dramatic story of this action at the Brawner Farm, a site added to the park in 1985. Developing an appropriate treatment of the present-day farmhouse on the site has been a key element of this planning effort.

Architectural and archeological investigations of the site over the last 20 years indicate that the present-day farmhouse was not standing on the site at the time of the August 1862 battle. Instead, the existing farmhouse dates to the post-Civil War period and consists of an older portion that may have been relocated to the site after the war and an ell addition completed around 1905. The extant structure partially overlays the foundation remains of an earlier dwelling dating to the late 18th or early 19th century, which is believed to be the last surviving remnant of the house occupied by the Brawner family in the 1860s. To provide for public access and interpretation of the battle site, the park worked with National Capital Region and Denver Service Center staff to develop a project to rehabilitate the existing structure, with an eye to respecting its complex construction history and preserving its archeological features.

With the availability of line item construction funding in FY 2005, the National Park Service initiated a contract to implement the rehabilitation project. The contracted work included rebuilding the stone foundation, as well as repairs to the sill and the building's framing and flooring systems. The contractor reused original flooring, windows, and trim where possible and replaced missing or badly damaged features, including some doors and nearly all of the plaster surfaces. The contractor also installed new exterior siding and a wood shingle roof. To support the building's adaptive use as an interpretive facility for Second Manassas, the contractor also installed electrical service, as well as an alarm and fire suppression system to protect the building. A new access road, parking lot, and pedestrian path were also constructed to improve site access for park visitors. With the substantial completion of the project in FY 2007, the rehabilitated house at Brawner Farm will be available to provide visitors a place to obtain an orientation to the battlefield and gain a greater understanding of the Second Manassas battle story.



From left to right, excavation of chimney base of kitchen/slave quarter (Feature 25) in the west yard; investigation of area around the kitchen/slave quarter; the west yard and farmhouse at the conclusion of the project. The paved pedestrian path on the far right of the photo was aligned to avoid impacting the archeological resources of the west yard area.



From left to right, interior views of farmhouse prior to rehabilitation: surviving remnant of stair rail on second floor; view of entry hall (Room 103), showing main stair with missing banister and newel post and damaged plaster surfaces; view of south bedroom (Room 205) and hall (Room 203) on second floor, showing damaged or missing plaster, flooring, and door trim; view of enclosed stair in kitchen (Room 102) on first floor.



From left to right, interior views of farmhouse following rehabilitation: view of surviving stair rail remnant with reproduction banister; view of entry hall (Room 103), with new banister and plaster surfaces; view of south bedroom (Room 205) and hall (Room 203) on second floor, showing repairs to plaster, flooring, and trim; view of enclosed stair in kitchen (Room 102) after repairs.